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| **Holidays as a reflection of the country’s history and traditions by Daria Gamzatova** |
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### Preface

Holyday is a period of time when you are not at work or school (according to <http://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/holiday_1?q=holiday>).

In the UK in 2015 there were 253 working days, 104 weekend days and as usually 8 public holydays (http://www.work-day.co.uk/workingdays\_holidays\_2015.htm365 days). These eight public holydays are:

December 25 - Christmas

Jan 1 – the New Year`s Day

Jan 2 – Boxing Day

Good Friday – the Friday before the Easter

Easter Monday

First Monday of May

Last Monday of May

Last Monday of August

In Russia in 2015 there were 247 working days, 104 weekend days and as usually 14 public holydays (<http://www.garant.ru/calendar/buhpravo/2016/#ixzz4ersZrSQk>).

Jan 1-6 – The New Year`s Holydays

Jan 8 – Christmas

Frbruary 23 – [Defender of the Fatherland Day](https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/russia/fatherland-defender)

March 8 – Women's Day

May 1 – Labor Day

May 9 – Victory Day

June 6 – Russian Day

November 4 – Unity Day

Thus, Russian people have 6 days more as holydays than British citizens do. We can suggest that in the UK people work more than in Russia and have less rest. However, the real situation is different from our expectations. As we can see at the chart below, total hours worked per year divided by the average number of people in employment per year in the UK is significantly less than in Russia. Indeed, it was 1370 hours per year in the UK in 2015 while in Russia it was 1978 hours. That means an average person in Russia works 608 hour more per year than the British one. Considering working day equal to 8 hours, it gives Russians about 76 additional working days per year per average Russian working person in comparison to British ones.

The fact that in Russia people work significantly more than in the UK is completely confirmed by OECD.

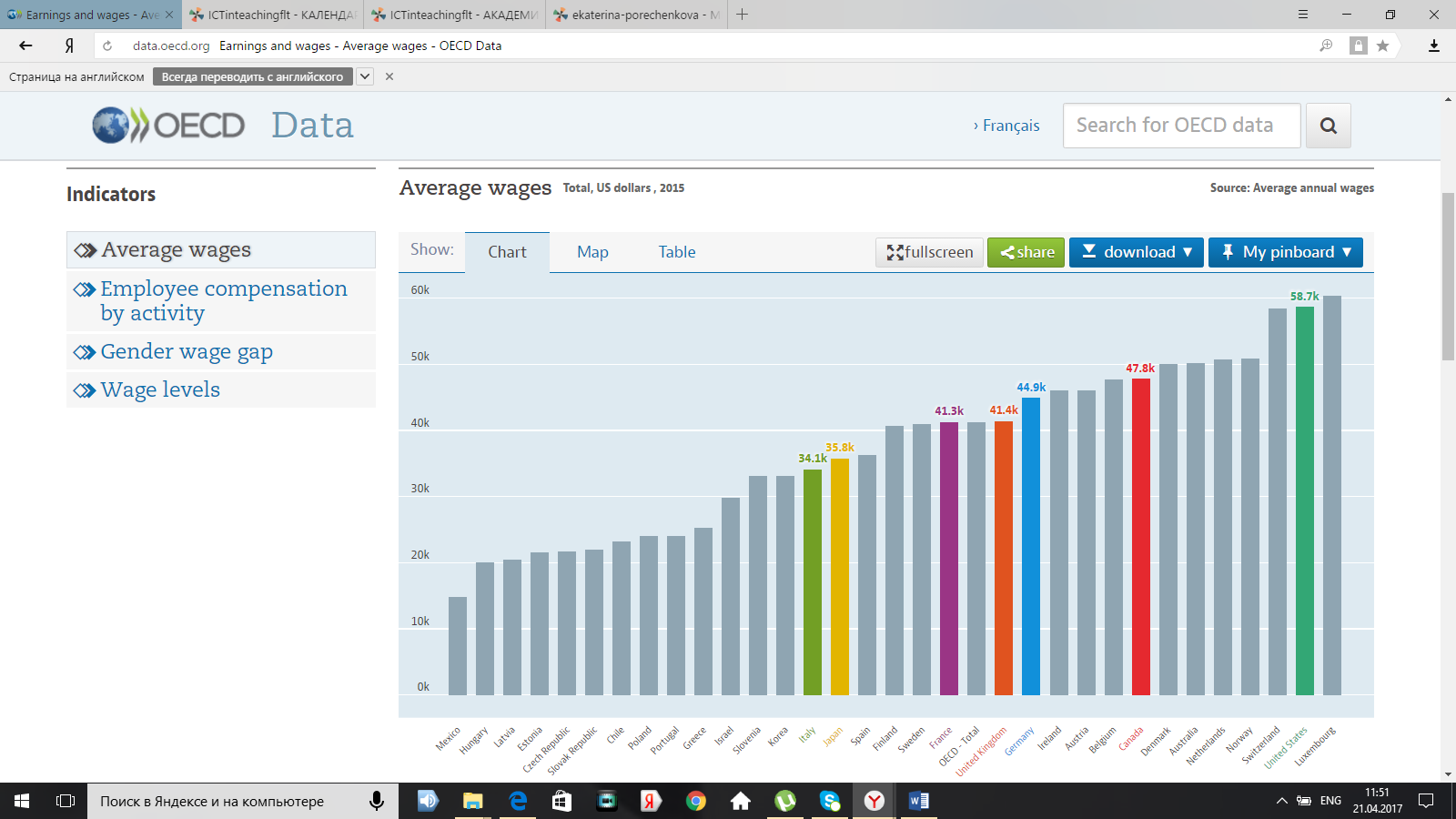


We have to take into consideration dramatical difference on average annual hours worked between the two countries when discussing the holydays as reflection of history and traditions. It means that in Russia on average person works almost all holydays and some weekend days.

In addition to the difference in real hours worked we have to remember about significant difference in life level in terms of money income. I tried to find the data on Russian average wages evaluated within OECD methodology but I could not. It seems that Russian national statistical agency doesn’t give that data to OESD. I address that question to the national statistical agency directly and made some calculations. I roughly estimated the 2015 average wage in Russia equal to 14 000 US $.

In the UK the average wage in 2015 was 44 900 US $ per year (see more <http://www.gks.ru/free_doc/doc_2016/rusfig/rus16e.pdf>, page 32).

Thus, we can see more than the tree times difference between the annual average income in the UK and Russia.



I have to also remind you about the huge variation in income level between 10% of the most rich and 10% of the most poor people in Russian and relatively small variation between 10% of the most rich and 10% of the most poor in the UK.

These are real current living, working and holydays conditions that people in Russia and the UK have. These are the real modern history and background of the holydays in Russia and the UK.

I will consider the UK holydays known also as national holidays or public holidays. In the UK the bank holiday term is used in that case also. In addition to national/public/bank holydays, we can find many very interesting and remarkable reginal or religious holydays. I was surprised that in the UK Jewish holidays as well as Hindu holidays and Muslim`s ones are celebrated widely but are not included into the list of bank /public holydays. People are to celebrate them after working day. Interestingly, in Russia there is no special regional holydays, while in the UK we can see many holydays that are celebrated in Wales only, or in Scotland only.

I will tell about the UK holidays as the reflection of the country’s history and traditions and give some comments on similar Russian holydays.

### Christmas and the [New Year's Day](https://www.timeanddate.com/holidays/russia/new-year-day), Boxing day

***Christmas***

***History***

Christmas and the New Year`s Day in the UK are very similar to the same holydays in Russia. Christian religion and common history of European civilization are behind the holydays for the both countries.

We tend to associate the arrival of Christianity in Britain with the mission of Augustine in 597 AD. But in fact Christianity arrived long before when Roman artisans and traders arriving in Britain spread the story of Jesus along with stories of their Pagan deities. During the 4th Century British Christianity became more visible but it had not yet won over the hearts and minds of the population. Pagan beliefs still abounded and Christianity was a minority faith. In 597 Augustine's famous mission from the Pope in Rome to King Aethelbert of Kent was very efficient. It really set up the future course of Christianity in Britain. There was the showdown between the Irish Christianity epitomised by Saint Columba and the international Roman brand of Christianity which had been brought by Augustine.

Christmas Day is in the United Kingdom on December 25. It traditionally celebrates Jesus Christ's birth but many aspects of this holiday have pagan origins. Christmas is a time for many people to give and receive gifts and prepare special festive meals. It is very important day for the families and friends.

***Traditions***

* Prior to Christmas Day people **decorate** their homes and gardens with Christmas trees and small colored fairy lights, leaves and berries from holly trees and mistletoe bushes. These include bringing pieces of evergreen trees into homes, lighting fires, holding parties and eating special foods. When missionaries converted the inhabitants of these countries to Christianity, many of these customs were included in the Christian celebrations.
* Many churches in the UK hold **special services** on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day. Some also organize shelter, company and food for the homeless or those who need help. Others hold events for people who wish to return to the spiritual aspects of Christmas and turn away from the commercial aspects of modern Christmas celebrations.
* A Christmas ceremony of great significance here is the **blessing of individual homes**. During Christmastime a priest visits every home accompanied by boys carrying vessels of holy water. A little water is sprinkled in each room, which is believed to usher in happiness and fortune to them. Another popular custom here is that of young children going from house to house on the first day of Christmas carrying a star and singing **carols** and getting sweets from adults
* **Family dinners** are the popular way of celebrating Christmas in the UK Many people spend Christmas Day with family members, with whom they exchange gifts and cards.



* Nearly everyone prepares and eats **special meal**. This often includes roast turkey, potatoes and parsnips, and other vegetables. After the main course Christmas pudding is often eaten. This is a heavy steamed, dense, cake-like pudding filled with dried fruit and nuts. Burning brandy is often poured over it as it is served, giving a spectacular effect. Mince pies are also popular on Christmas Day. They are sweet pastry cases filled with a mixture of dried fruit, fat and alcohol.
* Many children wake up **to find a sock** or stocking filled with small gifts on their bed or somewhere else in the house. These have supposedly been brought by a mythical figure called **'Father Christmas'** or **'Santa Claus'**, who lives for most of the year at the North Pole. He travels in a sleigh pulled by reindeer and enters houses by climbing down the chimney. He hopes to enjoy a small snack of mince pies and brandy at each house. He travels so fast that he can deliver presents to all children in one night, although in some stories elves help him with his work.
* In some places a **Nativity scene** is arranged. This illustrates the story of Jesus' birth using statues or actors and live animals.

In Russia in 1918 the new Gregorian calendar was entered into force to replace the old Julian calendar. The difference between both is 13 days. Christmas in Russia comes 13 days later than in the UK. In Russia Christmas was excluded from the list of national holydays in 1929 and included in 1991. In the UK Christmas has been celebrated for more than thousand years.

Russia celebrates a white Christmas with the weather being very very cold and snowy during this time and the temperature can drop to minus 30 degrees. In Russia the glorious services devoted to the birth of Jesus Christ are held also very late in the evening January 6. Many people keep fast to be prepared to the Christmas day. During that fast people pray, have very simple food and care about those who is in need. In Russia we also can see festival preparations of the streets and stores. There are lights, posters, flags, garlands and fir trees, as well as ice sculptures, snowmen and Father Frost figures. The preparations also are considered as a part of the meeting of the New Year. Christmas in Russia is not a festival for the relatives and friends like in the UK. Christmas is a religion day in Russia.

In Russia family and friends exchange gifts before the Christmas when the New Year`s day is celebrated. The gifts wait its owners under the fir tree till the morning of the January 1.For the Christmas day the children may have some additional presents. People also have special Christmas dinner, it can be duck with apples.

***The New Year`s day***

***History***

In pre-Christian Rome under the [Julian calendar](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julian_calendar), the day January 1 was dedicated to [Janus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Janus), god of gateways and beginnings, for whom [January](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/January) is also named. As a date in the Gregorian calendar of [Christendom](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christendom), New Year's Day liturgically marked the [Feast of the Naming and Circumcision of Jesus](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feast_of_the_Circumcision_of_Christ), which is still observed as such in the [Anglican Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anglican_Communion) and [Lutheran Church](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lutheran_Church). In the UK the New Year celebration become a national holyday in 1752.

***Tradition***

* On the New Year's Eve December 31 just before midnight people turn on a television to show pictures of one of the four clocks on the Clock Tower on the Palace of Westminster, or Houses of Parliament, in London counting down the last minutes of the old year. At midnight when the New Year begins **the chimes of Big Ben**, **the bell inside the Clock Tower**, are broadcast to mark the start of the New Year. Champagne and other wines are also served at this point.
* Many people hold **parties** at home or go out to pubs or night clubs. These parties often continue into the early hours of the morning. Hence, for many people, New Year's Day is time for recovering from the excesses of the night before.  For others, it is the last day of the Christmas holiday before they return to work. Some take the opportunity to carry out home improvements or to go for a walk in the country. In many places around the United Kingdom's coast, groups of people dress up in fancy costumes and run into the cold sea.
* Many people make **New Year's resolutions**. These are promises to themselves that they will lead a better life in some way in the coming year. Common New Year's resolutions include stopping smoking, losing weight, eating more healthily, getting more exercise or spending less money. Some types of resolution that would lead to a healthier lifestyle are supported by government advertising campaigns.
* In some areas there are customs associated with the New Year's Day. In Scotland many people **sing the song 'Auld Lang Syne'** (https://youtu.be/to1xT93IlUI ) at midnight as the New Year's Day begins.  In Scotland and northern England, it is customary **to go first footing**. This is the first person to enter a house on January 1. There are many traditions and superstitions associated with first footing. A male first-footer brings good luck, but a female bad luck. In different areas there are different traditions about whether the first footer should have fair or dark hair, whether the person should bring coal, salt or other things and what food or drink

In Russian the traditional New Year celebration is a dinner at home. Russians cook meat, potatoes and some salads or vegetarian meals as the Fast is on. People arrange feasts and visit friends and relatives to enjoy New Year together. On the New Year's Eve December 31 just before midnight many people also turn on a television to listen to the President speech in The Red Square. Champagne or other wines are often suggested. Decorated fir tree is placed into the dinner room. This tree is called ‘Novogodnaya Yolka’ and decorated like Christmas tree with different special toys and topped with red star with five ends. Before 1917 the David`s star was used, after 1920 the red star replaced the David`s one. In 1990 when many people came to religion, the old style star returned in many families. In Soviet Union, Grandfather Frost replaced Santa. Grand Frost is also known as Ded Moroz and he is accompanied by a fairy who is his granddaughter, Snegurochka (Snow Maiden). She helps Frost in distributing the sweets and toys to the kids. Grand father frost resembles the Santa Claus with big tummy and white beard. This character carries bag of toys and distributes it to all the children on the New Year eve. This is one of the beliefs in Russia. The only difference is that Santa wear red and Frost wears blue.

Russians often make wish on the New Year Eve December 31. The believe is that if a wish is made on this eve it would be surely fulfilled. Some people write their desires on paper and burn it on candle. Then this ash is mixed in glass of champagne and consumed by them. The festival preparations start from December and the streets are beautified with lights, posters, flags, garlands and fir trees. The stores are  decorated with ice sculptures, snowmen and Father Frost figures.

***Boxing Day***

***History***

Boxing Day is usually celebrated on the following day after Christmas Day, which is December 26. However, strictly speaking, Boxing Day is the first weekday after Christmas. Traditionally, December 26 was the day to open the Christmas Box to share the contents with the poor. The Christmas box is a wooden or clay container where people placed gifts.

We know several versions of Boxing Day origination.

* 1. 'Alms Box' was placed in every church on Christmas Day, into which worshippers placed gift for the poor of the parish. These boxes were always opened the day after Christmas, thus that day became known as Boxing Day.
  2. Many poorly paid workers were required to work on Christmas Day and took the following day off to visit their families. As they prepared to leave, their employers would present them with Christmas boxes.
  3. During the late 18th century, Lords and Ladies of the manor would "box up" their leftover food, or sometimes gifts and distribute them the day after Christmas to tenants who lived and worked on their lands.

***Traditions***

* The tradition of **giving money to workers** still continues today. It is customary for householders to give small gifts or monetary tips to regular visiting trades people (the milkman, dustman, coalman, paper boy etc.) and for some employers to give a Christmas bonus to employees.
* Now **Schools across the country gather together gifts** to put in Christmas Boxes and send to poorer countries.

### Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday and Last Monday of May in the UK



***History***

Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday and Last Monday of May remind about the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and his resurrection as well as the Christian Pentecost based on the New Testament, where it refers to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ, as described in the Acts of the Apostles.

Good Friday falls just before Easter Sunday, which is the first Sunday after the first full moon on or after the March equinox.

It can seem strange that a day of death and suffering is known as 'Good' Friday. The word 'Good' may be a different spelling or rendering of 'God' or it may have another, now lost, meaning of 'holy'. Another theory is that the tragedy of the crucifixion of Jesus brought great 'good' to his followers.

***Traditions***

* In the UK people will probably **attend special church services** on Good Friday, Easter Eve and Easter. Many Christians have **Lent**. It is traditional for all denominations to eat hot cross buns. These are made of leavened dough, to which sugar, currants and spices have been added. The top of the bun is marked with a cross made of flour and water paste or rice paper. The buns are eaten as they are or split in half, toasted and spread with butter. There is a traditional rhyme about these buns, which is often used to teach children basic music notes.
* For many other people it is a day off work in the spring to work in their **gardens.** Many people take advantage of the long Easter weekend and the school holidays at this time of year to take a short **vacation**.
* **Easter Eggs** are a very old tradition going to a time before Christianity. Eggs are a symbol of spring and new life. Exchanging and eating Easter eggs is a popular custom in many countries. Many people celebrate Easter Sunday by decorating, exchanging or searching for eggs. The eggs may be fresh or boiled eggs laid by chickens or other birds, chocolate eggs or eggs made of other materials.
* Many children believe that the **Easter bunny or rabbit** comes to their house or garden to hide eggs. Some businesses and attractions hold special Easter egg games. These can be competitions to see who can collect the most eggs or something else.  For example, in the north of England they still carry out the custom of egg rolling. Hard boiled eggs are rolled down the slope  of a hill to see whose egg goes furthest. In other places another game is played. You hold an egg in the palm of the hand and bang against your opponent’s egg. The loser is the one whose egg breaks first.
* Rabbits, due to their fecund nature, have always been a symbol of **fertility**. The Easter bunny (rabbit) however may actually be an Easter hare. The hare was allegedly a companion of the ancient Moon goddess and of Eostre. However, the bunny as an Easter symbol seems to come to the UK from Germany, where it was first mentioned in German writings in the 16th Century. The first **edible** Easter bunnies appeared in Germany during the early 1800s, they were made of pastry and sugar. Children in the UK believe that if they are good the «Easter Bunny » will leave (chocolate) eggs for them.
* **Dressing Up for Easter**. Easter was once a traditional day for getting married, that may be why people often dress up for Easter. Women wear special **Easter bonnets** — decorated with flowers and ribbons. Even today in London there is a special **Easter Parad**e, where hand-made bonnets are shown.
* **Easter Food.** **Hot cross buns**, now eaten throughout the Easter season, were first baked in England to be served on **Good Friday**. These small, lightly sweet **yeast** buns contain raisins and sometimes chopped candied fruit. A traditional way of **breaking the Lenten fast** is to eat some Simnel cake. It is a fruit cake with marzipan covering and plenty of candied lemon peel and dried fruit.

In Russia we do not have national holydays devoted to Good Friday, Easter or Easter Monday. However many Russian people actually celebrate them in churches, at homes and in their hearts. Some people also go to the Church services regularly at that time. Seven weeks before Easter Russian Christians do not eat meat, milk, eggs and sometimes vegetable oil to keep **Lenten fast**. On the Easter day the tables at homes could be decorated with white clothes, colored eggs, special meal made from cottage cheese and sweet Easter Cake “Kulitsh”.

In both countries we can see similar traditions to celebrate Good Friday, Easter, Easter Monday.

***Last Monday of May***

***History***

The spring bank holiday starts on the **Monday after Pentecost**. This is known as **Whitsun** or **Whit Monday** in the United Kingdom. The Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971 moved this bank holiday to the last Monday in May.

***Traditions***

* For many people the spring bank holiday is a pleasant day off work or school. Some people choose to take a **short trip or vacation**. Others use the time to walk in the country, catch up with family and friends, **visit garden centers or do home maintenance**.
* On **Cooper's Hill in Brockworth, Gloucestershire**, people race down a steep hill following a large round cheese. The hill is concave and has inclines in some places. The first person to cross the finishing line wins a **Double Gloucester cheese** weighing about 8lbs (around 3.5kg). The custom may have been started by the Romans or ancient Britons and be an ancient fertility rite or a way of guaranteeing the rights of the villagers to graze their livestock on the surrounding land. In some years, there have been lots of injuries, causing the event to be cancelled a couple of times in recent years. In these years, the cheese was rolled down the hill, but nobody was allowed to chase it.
* In **Endon in Staffordshire**, the villagers dress their well, hold a fayre (village celebration) and crown a girl as the **Well Dressing Queen**. Local men hold a competition, known as **'Tossing the Sheaf'**, in which they compete to see who can toss a bale of straw the highest. In other places, boats are used for competitions.
* Another traditional form of dancing, **Morris dancing**, is also associated with the beginning of May. Morris dancing is popular tradition on **Whitsun and Day May (**First Monday of May). This type of dancing is nearly always carried out exclusively by men who dress in white with bells on various parts of their costumes and carry scarves and long wooden sticks. The dancing is accompanied by loud accordion music. 

In Russia many traditions of celebrating the Pentecost were lost. To attend service in church is now the only way to celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and other followers of Jesus Christ.

### First Monday of May and Last Monday of August

***First Monday of May***

***History***

The first Monday of May probably originated as a Roman festival honoring the beginning of the summer season. In more recent times, it has been as a day to campaign for and celebrate workers' rights.

In many places, the first day or the first Monday in May is celebrated as the start of the summer season. Events are held to celebrate the end of the winter season, the fertility and hope of the approaching summer.

Many types of May Day celebrations date back to fertility rituals performed in pagan times. This is particularly true of events to celebrate Flora, a Roman goddess. Through the ages, there have been some attempts to outlaw this type of celebration, because it was seen as unchristian. However, the celebrations have been remarkably robust.

***Traditions***

* Widespread tradition is **maypole dancing**. Children, particularly girls, dance around a tall pole, from which ribbons are suspended. The aim of the dance is to create a decorative pattern on the pole with the ribbons. Many schools, particularly in rural areas, organize displays of maypole dancing.



* Other traditions include making **floral garlands**, decorating houses with flowers and leaves and **crowning a May queen** as a living image of the Roman goddess Flora. In some areas, girls go out very early to wash their faces in the morning dew. This is supposed to make them very beautiful in the coming year.
* In Rochester, there is a festival of **chimney sweeps**. Traditionally, May 1 was the only day in the year that they did not have to work.
* May 1 or the first Monday in May is also a day for **large marches**, particularly London, to celebrate and demand rights for workers. Many aspects of these marches are organized by the trade unions. Some people travel very large distances to join in the marches. In some years, the marches have ended violently, but in recent times they have remained peaceful.

Russian people also celebrate May 1 as Labor Day. Large marches devoted to the celebration of right for workers used to happen in Soviet times. Now many people go to the countryside to the ‘datsha’ to have barbeque with family and friends.

***Last Monday of August***

***History***

The summer bank holiday was introduced in the Bank Holidays Act 1871 and first observed in that year. It was originally intended to give bank employees the opportunity to participate and attend cricket matches. Exactly one hundred years later, the Banking and Financial Dealings Act 1971 moved this bank holiday to the last Monday in August for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This followed a trial period from 1965 to 1970 of the new date. In Scotland, it remained on the first Monday in August. This day marks the end of the summer holidays for many people who return to work or school in the autumn.

***Traditions***

* For many people, the summer bank holiday marks the end of the summer. Some people **take trips or short** **vacations** during the three day weekend. For others, it is another opportunity to work in their **gardens or carry out home** improvements.
* In London the **Notting Hill Carnival** is held. This street festival is known for its exuberant costumes, dancing and music played by steel drum bands. The festival has been held every year since 1965 and was originally organized by immigrants from the Caribbean, particularly Trinidad, to the United Kingdom. It started as a protest against the racism, poor working and housing conditions that they suffered. Today, the Notting Hill Carnival is a multicultural celebration, attracting over two million people. It is thought to be the second largest street carnival in the world.